

Ladder of Inference - Tool for making informed decisions

Ladder of Inference

What is the Ladder of Inference?

The ladder of inference is a critical-thinking tool used for making effective decisions

Actions

Beliefs

Conclusions

Assumptions

Meanings

Selected Data

Observations

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Move slowly and deliberately from one rung to the next, reflecting on your thoughts at every stage. Think of the ladder as a tool to check yourself, rather than a series of steps to be followed

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Ladder of Inference

Rung #1

Observations

Collect data and information from your environment

Observations

Pro tip:

- Use powerful questioning to get maximum information
- Try to put your beliefs aside and don't assume anything
- Practice active listening

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Ladder of Inference

Rung #2

Selected Data

Select facts from the collected observations

Selected Data

Observations

Pro tip:

- Select wisely. Do not miss onto important data that you might need to make your decision
- Try to stay objective
- Do not let your biases come at play when selecting facts from information

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Ladder of Inference

Rung #3

Meanings

Interpret and assign personal meaning to the selected facts

Meanings

Selected Data

Observations

Pro tip:

- When you start to assign meaning to things, ask yourself why you're choosing one meaning over another
- Try to look at the selected data from different perspectives

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Ladder of Inference

Rung #4

Assumptions

Make assumptions based on the meaning you give to your observations

Assumptions

Meanings

Selected Data

Observations

Pro tip:

- Challenge your assumptions
- Ensure that your assumptions are based on your observation and facts and not your pre-held beliefs
- Give examples of what you assume. This will help others to understand your thought process better

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Ladder of Inference

Rung #5

Conclusions

Draw conclusions, based on your assumptions

Conclusions

Assumptions

Meanings

Selected Data

Observations

Pro tip:

- Ask others to explain the steps that they might have taken in reaching the conclusions they have
- Give yourself enough time to think things through and explore all options

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Ladder of Inference

Rung #6

Beliefs

Adopt beliefs that are associated with your conclusions

Beliefs

Conclusions

Assumptions

Meanings

Selected Data

Observations

Pro tip:

- Beware of the reflexive loop- the beliefs we form might impact what data we select the next time we're in a similar scenario
- State your beliefs explicitly. Be open to different perspectives

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Ladder of Inference

Rung #7

Actions

Take actions that are rooted in what you believe to be true

Actions

Beliefs

Conclusions

Assumptions

Meanings

Selected Data

Observations

Pro tip:

- Look for alternative course of actions
- Refrain from taking impulsive decisions. Make sure your emotions are not influencing your actions

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Ladder of Inference

Here is a worked example:

Actions

Beliefs

Conclusions

Assumptions

Meanings

Selected Data

Observations

Kim will not be invited to project meetings from now on

Someone who is is not interested in the meeting should not be invited

Kim doesn't find this project important

Kim doesn't care about the work I am doing for this project

Kim is bored and not interested in the project

Kim was on his phone the whole time and didn't participate at all

Kim is looking on his phone during the project briefing

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What action did I choose? Is there an alternative action?

What beliefs led to this action?

Why did I draw this conclusion?

What are my assumptions about the situation and why?

Why have I understood the situation in this way?

What observations did I choose to use and why?

What information did I collect from my environment?

✗

Climbed up the ladder too fast

✓

Move slowly up the ladder and challenge your thinking at each step

Actions

Beliefs

Conclusions

Assumptions

Meanings

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